



Rural Development Strategy for Desert Villages with Emphasis on Rural Tourism

Case Study: Kharanagh Village in Yazd Province



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Abstract

One of the problems observed in desert villages is deterioration of agricultural activities resulted in unemployment and migration of residents to adjacent cities. It seems that the only way these villages can choose to survive is utilizing suitable alternatives for future development adapted with sustainability concepts. One of these villages is Kharanagh (located in 125km northeast of Yazd) that is situated near desert and has great potential for attracting tourists.

On the other hand, Tourism and tourism economy is becoming one of the most important sectors in all over the world. Furthermore, many of planners and policy makers regard tourism industry as the main element of sustainable development. In parallel with, rural tourism is one of sub sectors of tourism industry that can have effective role developing regions and finally national development by a structured planning and identifying limitations and advantages.

This article using RDS technique (that has a similar methodology and process to CDS¹) has depicted a development vision for Kharanagh village based on rural tourism development. This technique is based on one of the main goals of Reconstruction and Development Program that is used for reconstructing and developing villages and is the main program for challenging poverty and enabling rural residents.

The finding shows that tourism attractions should be searched in historical, natural and socio-cultural aspects. As Kharanagh has so valuable heritage and is located in a region full of valuable centers and monumental buildings that we can focus on tourism to introduce and identify its attractions to bloom the village economically.

Key words: Kharanagh, Rural Development Challenges, Rural Development Strategy, Rural Tourism.

1. Introduction

¹ City Development Strategy

Rural development is an old concept, although it has changed continuously in order to organize development in rural areas. Rural development importance in developing countries roots the significance of rural areas in their economy (UNDP, 1992: 10). Altogether, rural development is considered as an effective strategy for improvement of social and economical life of poor villages; although, it should be considered that increasing in production and employment opportunities, improvement of productivity and development in human resources should not destroy environment and ecosystem of the village and should follow sustainable development strategies (World Bank, 1992: 13). Nowadays, rural settlements especially in developing countries like Iran challenges with critical problems such as migration to cities, low rate of employment and productivity in agricultural sector and lack of infrastructure (Roknaldine Eftekhari & Ghaderi, 2002:23); These problems are more evident in desert villages (Mahdavi, 2000:81), because desert village life is dependent on agriculture and the water is acquired from Qanats networks that nowadays are dried and do not provide sufficient water for agriculture; In addition, level of ground water is lower than ever. The result is migration of the residents to near cities. Decreasing the population in a village causes destroying of all cultures, traditions and valuable fabrics of the people that have formed in centuries. In other hand, migration will influence on employment and production system of the region; after migration to cities, the people settle surrounding the city and build shanty towns and will experience a miserable life. So, it is important to find a sustainable economic pattern to strengthen agricultural activities before critical condition expecting desert villages. Despite these problems, many desert villages have natural and cultural potentials that can provide many of tourists needs. In Iran, considering cultural, religious and economical limitations, the main focus is on cultural, historical and religious tourism and there in no notice to natural and rural tourism in tourism industry. Investment and rural tourism advertisement can be the lost loop for rural development. In fact, this type of tourism not only has attraction for tourists but also is a suitable factor to help rural household economy. This results in decreasing migration to cities, strengthening agricultural productions and increasing Gross National Product.

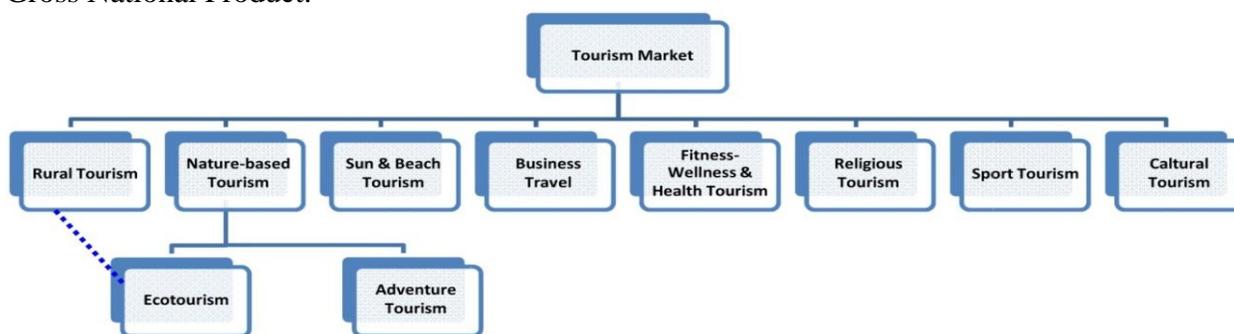


Fig 1: All Tourism Various Markets in the World- Source: Authors.

Necessity of systematic approach to rural environment

Studying rural development trends in Iran, we can understand why the villages are not sustainable. In fact, by industrial revolution, agricultural manufacturing that followed a traditional mode changed to mechanization. As a result, the need to human force decreased and many people migrated to cities to find job. This reformation started in Iran in 1960. Although cities expansion and migration from villages to cities had a slow rate in first decays of 13 century, but by change in socio-economical relations created rapid cities

expansion, change in socio-economical household relations and evolution in household occupancy (Habibi & Ahari, 2004:5). In fact, this trajectory is followed in many countries like Iran. Unfortunately, rural guide plan don't have a systematic and updated look to rural environment and are summarized to land use, infrastructure and future village development direction maps, provided consumption context, migration and demolition of rural production system, resulted in decreasing rural population from 70% to 30% of total country population (statistical center of Iran, 2006). Villages in Iran are the smallest parts in administrative divisions and are created by several natural and human factors. So, every element and factor should work properly to secure growth and survival of the village. As noted earlier, village is a geographic unit that works systematically. In other words, village is a complex with inters pinned elements that interact with each other. Certainly, holism is considered in every phenomenon that has connection and interaction with its environment and hierarchy is the main characteristic of holism. It is evident when the elements operate logically, system work rightly and holism continues to exist; but, if one of the elements gets failed, system run a high risk and the holism get apart (Mahdavi, 2000:80). So, the main cause of negative migration or village deterioration is incorrect performance of village elements. For instance, when the only source of water like qanat or well in the village is out of order, one of the elements gets problem and the village survival fall in danger. In fact, when each of natural or human village elements gets problem that can't continue its responsibility, the village will damage and can't sustain. If the element has a main role in the village, the extent of damage will be more and may cause system deterioration. We should accept that after development, some elements may work improperly; but we should replace another element. So, if economical and agricultural system of village is damaged, we should replace an element that village ecosystem will sustain. Studies shows that the best economical option for village bloom in lack of agricultural products is rural tourism (Oppermann, 1996: 89).

Rural tourism and tourism industry importance

Tourism is the world's largest industry and was projected to be the world's largest employer by the year 2000. It needs a little investment and creates many jobs. In fact, it creates one job for every six tourist and can provide space not only for professionals but also for armatures (Rezvani, 1995:61). Nowadays, tourism and tourism economy is transforming to one of the main basics of world economy. In addition, many of planners and policy makers in development context consider tourism as the main element of sustainable development. Rural tourism is one of the sub elements of tourism industry that can have effective role in development of the regions by a suitable planning and identification of limitations and possibilities, resulted in national development and economy (Roknadine Eftekhari & Mahdavi, 2006:1). According to World Tourism Organization statistics, Although Iran is ranked ten for tourism attraction and for diversity five, but is not high in tourism absorption and Iran's quota from tourism income is one to thousand (Makian & Naderi Bani, 2003:196). On the other hand, although we are in 21 century, rural tourism in Iran faces with big problems because rural development strategies like rural guide plan were not successful and could not solve some important issues such as poverty, hygiene, food, employment and environment sustainability. This caused that rural development be focused in recent years and theorists, planners and authorities try to decrease the problems by offering new alternatives and strategies. For solving the problem, we can use natural, cultural and historical potentials

of Iran's rural regions and avoid of migration and deterioration of rural system by utilizing environmental opportunities.

Rural tourism; an instrument for rural development

Rural development is an increasingly popular subject. It is identified with integrated, multi-functionality and sustainability, concepts that are fuzzy (Kostov & Lingard, 2001). Rural development is understood to be multi-dimensional, encompassing improved provision of services, enhanced opportunities for income generation and local economic development, improved physical infrastructure, social cohesion and physical security within rural communities, active representation in local political processes, and effective provision for the vulnerable.

Tourism has long been considered as a potential means for socio-economic development and regeneration of rural areas, in particular those affected by the decline of traditional agrarian activities. Peripheral rural areas are also considered to be repositories of older ways of life and cultures that respond to the postmodern tourists' quest for authenticity (Urry, 2002). Thus, the encouragement for rural tourism has become a common policy both in developed countries (Perales & Yague, 2002; MacDonald and Joliffe, 2003; OECD, 1994) and in developing ones (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004; Hall, 2004). This increasing support for rural tourism is based upon a number of perceived benefits it potentially provides to rural areas. According to Roberts and Hall (2001) and Hall et al. (2004), benefits can be summarized as follows:

- The economic growth, diversification and stabilization through employment creation in tourism business;
- The provision of supplementary income in farming, craft and service sector;
- The opportunity to realize the economic value of specific, quality-based production of food products, as well as of unused and abandoned buildings;
- The increment in social contacts, especially in breaking down the isolation of the most remote areas and social groups;
- The opportunity to re-evaluate the heritage and its symbols, the environment and the identity.

However, there are a number of widespread weaknesses which can affect the business and reduce the stimulus for rural development. Lack of professionalism is a frequent complaint addressed at family businesses. Low entry barriers in rural tourism might attract people with no relevant training or education, which can seriously limit their potential to grow or prosper.

The Overall Objective of the Rural Development Strategy:

The overall objective of the Rural Development Strategy is to provide a strategic framework that will facilitate the co-coordinated implementation of sector policies and strategies concerned with the development of rural communities. In particular, the RDS will support the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and create a development environment that will contribute to enabling rural communities and households achieving sustainable livelihoods. In this respect the Rural Development Strategy will identify short and medium term priorities that will support the goal of sustainable livelihoods, and contribute to the long term goal, of sustained economic growth (North & Cameron, 2000). In fact, the Rural Development Strategy defines (Babington, 2001):

- An institutional framework for co-coordinating and linking sector specific strategies and programs.

- The roles of central Government, local authorities, the private sector and civil society in the implementation and monitoring of rural development programs.
- The key linkages between sector specific strategies and programs, and describe how those linkages will be strengthened.
- The gaps in current policies and strategies, including implementation constraints, and outline strategic actions for responding to those gaps.
- The criteria for addressing geographical inequalities.
- The coordination mechanisms.
- The criteria for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Rural Development Strategy.

The Dimensions of Rural Development Strategy:

The realization of rural development in the context of the country's development vision largely depends on the pace of growth in the agricultural sector, the adoption of a positive mindset by the rural society, and a re-focusing of the institutional framework on the rural areas. In this context, attention should be towards attaining the following:

(i) High Quality Livelihood

For rural dwellers, high quality livelihood will mean having access to affordable basic needs. This includes having access to sufficient and adequate food, preventive and curative health care; shelter and clothing; education and training; and safe water. They also need access to irrigation, energy, information, transportation and communication (Curry, 1994).

(ii) An Enabling and Peoples Empowering Environment

Any initiative towards realizing human development and reducing poverty in a more consistent and sustainable manner should involve the people concerned. This implies that the stakeholders: communities; individuals; households; firms; organization and associations, are best positioned to know their social, political and economic problems and needs, as well as their environmental, cultural and spiritual aspirations. The Rural Development Strategy provides an enabling environment and effective institutional framework that puts people at the center of their development. People should be empowered to guide the development process and influence it towards the direction and speed they perceive it to be in tandem with their future development aspirations (Murdoch, 2000).

(iii) Self-Reliance and Self-Sustenance

The role of community and individual initiatives is of paramount importance and is given due recognition in the strategy. This goes beyond providing and supporting enabling and facilitating institutional structures and processes necessary to facilitate implementation. It also requires deliberate efforts towards changing the people's mindset. The Rural Development Strategy provides a framework for stimulating private sector growth and development by streamlining procedures and rationalizing taxes and fees connected with doing business in rural areas (Ibid, 2000).

(iv) Trade and International Competitiveness

Globalization has profoundly altered the direction and patterns of world production and trade. The introduction of new technology especially in the fields of information, biotechnology,

material sciences and renewable energies has played an important role in shifting competitive advantages across nations and regions. This in turn, has restructured international trade and investment patterns sometimes in contrary with the traditional determining factors such as availability of raw materials, proximity to markets, sources of cheap labor and climate. The impacts of these changes have taken various forms (Ibid, 2000). The Rural Development Strategy focuses on strengthening capacities to investigate and identify investment potentials in a more liberalized and competitive economic environment. The RDS outlines legal, regulatory and administrative measures necessary to stimulate growth and safeguard property rights;

Kharanagh village introduction

This village is located in a mountainside area, with arid climate, 85 km to Ardakan, and is one of the historical villages of Yazd (Figure 1). The seasonal stream of Kharanagh is located in the east, and mount Ghal'eh is located in the northwest. Historical citadel and its unique architecture make Kharanagh a distinctive village. But, over the years and by changing the lifestyle in modern era the population of the village moved outside the citadel. Now the village is divided into two parts; Modern part, where the people are now living, and old, empty part which has eroded. After the *Land Reform* in Iran, the population immigrated to cities nearby and this process increased by decreasing the groundwater in Kharanagh, the most important factor for agriculture resulted in -1/5 population rate in 1996-2006 period.

Index	Year	1966	1976	1986	1996	2006
Population		266	270	278	365	314
Growth Rate		-	0.15	0.3	2.76	-1.5
Number of households		75	78	72	86	98
Length of households		3.5	3.5	3.8	4.2	3.0

Table 1: Demographic changes from 1966 to 2006 in the Kharanagh village;
(Source: Statistical Centre of Iran)

Despite all the constraints, Kharanagh has much potential for rehabilitation and redevelopment in all aspects. The old village is located on top of a small hill, so the view is impressive and the mosque minaret intensifies the whole feeling from the view. Narrow passages among clay buildings, covered passages, houses built just from sunburn bricks and wood and surroundings covered by farm lands make the village an excellent place for tourists. The brushwood outside the village in the middle of the desert makes it more attractive and suitable for recreational, tourism and economical activities. Tourism attractions should be searched in historical, natural and socio-cultural aspects. As Kharanagh has so valuable heritage and is located in a region full of valuable centers and monumental buildings that we can focus on tourism to introduce and identify its attractions to bloom the village economically.



Figs 2: Kharanagh desert village; Yazd Province, a surprising village in heart of the desert.

Using Rural Development Strategy in Desert Villages:

Although rural development strategy defines various criteria and dimensions for improvement of rural environment and quality of life, but in critical condition of Iran's desert villages like Kharanagh, rural development strategy can be based on investment in rural tourism and ecotourism. This strategy can solve many Kharanagh problems and can be used for most of desert villages. The income earned not only can stop migration but also absorb the immigrants and revitalize agriculture and gardening.

Kharanagh residents survive by agricultural activities, but when the Qanats dried, the agricultural activities decreased and most of the residents migrated to near cities. It seems that investment for revitalizing of Qanats is not economical, but as mentioned earlier; we can invest in the main village attraction-the citadel and its surprising historical city-to revitalize the village economy accompanied by a suitable advertizing. Another village potential is its location that is near Yazd-Mashhad road. This important road can define and strengthen the village tourism.

Rural development strategy plans like city development ones, is defined by specific objectives, strategies, action activities, implementing institutions, outputs and verifiable indicators. The table below shows the Iran's desert village strategies for rural tourism.

Specific Objective	Strategic Action	Activities	Implementing Institutions	Output	Verifiable Indicators
To increase the net benefit for the poor from tourism and ensure that tourism growth contributes to poverty reduction	<p>1.1 Create new diversified products (services) and markets based on unique attributes, natural resources, arts and cultural attractions of Iran's villages</p> <p>1.2 Develop guidelines and general management plans to guide investments in the natural resource in order to control harmful developments and practices</p> <p>1.3 Develop partnership and close working cooperation between the public and private sectors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish new training Institutions Organize education and training programmed Devise marketing strategies and promotion programmers Revise existing environmental legislation and regulations Strengthen re-enforcement of the environmental legislation 	<p>Cultural heritage organization</p> <p>Housing foundation for villages</p> <p>Agricultural ministry</p> <p>DCs: District Commissioner</p> <p>LGAs: Local Government Authorities</p> <p>Private Sector</p> <p>NGOs: Non Governmental Organization</p> <p>Donors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased number of tourists in Iran Increased contribution of tourism to foreign exchange generation Increased contribution of tourism to national income Increased employment in the sector Improved quality of the natural environment Increased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tourists Foreign exchange Tourism GDP Employment The natural environment Private sector investment Participation of the local Communities Accrued benefits

	<p>1.4 Incorporate local communities in planning and operation</p> <p>1.5 Promote a diversity of actions, from micro to macro level including product development, marketing, planning and investment</p> <p>1.6 Ensure commercial viability is a priority – through paying close attention to demand, product quality, marketing, investment in business skills and inclusion of the private sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize and train the key stakeholders • Provide incentive to encourage private sector participation • Mobilize and build capacity of the local communities • programmers for the key Stakeholders • Provide incentives to encourage private sector participation 		<p>participation and investment of the private sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved participation of the local communities in planning and operation • Improved benefit sharing 	
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Table 2: Rural Development Strategy for Desert Villages in Iran with Emphasis on Rural Tourism

Conclusion:

In order to implement the development pattern in desert villages that are eradicated, a comprehensive rural development strategy should be prepared. This pattern should depict the vision and development strategy for the villages. Considering that rural development activities are multidimensional, the pattern must be an integrated rural development. In addition, every village should have a specific development strategy that is defined in overall development framework.

As in desert villages like Kharanagh, activity and economical diversity is lower, development can be based on rural tourism and the other sectors like agriculture and gardening be harmonized with tourism. First, we should have an extensive knowledge about desert villages to plan and adjust desert rural development strategy. The knowledge can be achieved by understanding of rural problems like villages have a negative migration and deterioration in agriculture and gardening and knowledge about potentials and natural, biological, cultural and historical possibilities of villages. Then, we should have a SWOT analysis to classify the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threatens of the village. In addition, we should solve the problems facing with rural tourism and invest in the village to bloom the potentials; in this stage advertising and marketing is inevitable.

In order to improve rural tourism in desert villages, we can define a tourism loop and introduce it to tourists. It means the villages with high potentials for tourism should be identified and set in a tourism loop with a suitable origin and destination that the tourists visit the villages in the best time.

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